



**Harvard Family
Research Project**



Preschool for California's Children

Summary of 2003–2008 Evaluation Findings

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March 2009

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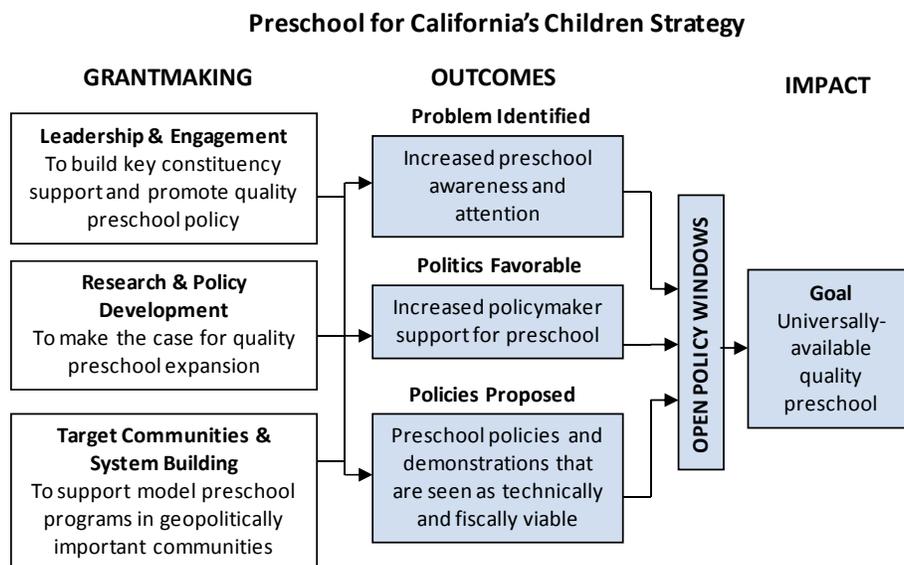
Overview

In 2003, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation began the Preschool for California’s Children grantmaking program (referred to here as the Preschool Program) to help achieve a bold and ambitious vision—voluntary quality preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds in California by 2013. To achieve this vision, the Preschool Program aims for public policy changes that will provide the funding and directives to ensure California’s one million children can access the quality preschool experiences they need to succeed in school and beyond.¹

This brief summarizes evaluation findings about the Preschool Program at its midpoint. It synthesizes data that Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) has gathered over the last 5 years to document progress and identify areas for improvement.

Five years in, considerable progress has been made. As this brief reveals, a strong preschool advocacy community has developed to firmly root preschool on the state’s policy agenda. Policymaker support for quality preschool expansion now exists at the state and local level where it only nominally existed before. Consequently, several important policies and investments have increased preschool access and quality in the state.

At the same time, strategy adjustments can increase chances for further advancements. While progress has occurred, it has been incremental, and California still has significant unmet preschool needs. In addition, the budget deficit has lessened the likelihood that the state will make any major preschool investments in the near term. Therefore, while the overall grantmaking strategy remains sound, HFRP recommends the Packard Foundation make several strategy modifications and adjust its 2013 universal goal to a more targeted goal focused on advancing policies that benefit children in California who need preschool the most.



¹ As a private family foundation, the Packard Foundation does not advocate for candidates, legislation, or ballot initiatives, and is agnostic about if and how California’s voters cast their ballots or lawmakers vote. The Packard Foundation is permitted to use its funds to influence public policy as long as the activities are outside the definitions of lobbying or are within exceptions created by the Internal Revenue Code and Regulations.

Strategy and Evaluation Summary

The Preschool Program aims for several outcomes to pave the way for policy changes. First, it strives to build awareness and political will among policymakers and other constituencies that the lack of quality preschool in California is an important problem in need of a state-sponsored solution. It also aims to increase their willingness to support research-based policies. Finally, the Preschool Program seeks political support for high-quality preschool demonstrations that can be scaled up statewide.

To achieve these outcomes, the Preschool Program supports three grantmaking strategies that to date total \$45 million in more than 250 grants.² *Leadership and engagement* grants (48% of total investments) support education, outreach, and advocacy to political leaders and key constituencies.³ *Research and policy development* grants (13% of the total) support projects that reinforce the preschool evidence base and ground policy development in research. *Target communities and systems building* grants (39% of the total) support preschool expansion, quality improvements, and constituency building in geopolitically significant communities⁴ in the state to increase children’s access to quality programs and attract state and local political support.

HFRP’s evaluation addresses four main questions.⁵ These questions appear at right, along with the data collection methods used to answer them (all but one are conducted annually). HFRP also completed interviews in 2008 with a set of preschool “insiders” (grantees and nongrantees) to inform this brief.

Because advocacy and policy change efforts are not easily assessed using traditional program evaluation techniques, the Preschool Program evaluation is methodologically innovative and includes a new method developed specifically for this evaluation.

Bellwether interviews assess where preschool stands on the state policy agenda and how lawmakers and other policy insiders in California are thinking and talking about it. The method involves structured interviews with high-profile *bellwethers*—policy “influentials” in California who are involved in or track state-level politics (policymakers, business leaders, media, think tanks/academia, funders, and nonchild advocates). *Bellwethers are not funded by the Packard Foundation*. HFRP interviewed 40 state-level bellwethers in 2005 and 74 in 2008 (44 at the state level and 30 locally).

Evaluation Questions and Methods

Questions	Methods
1) Have preschool <u>awareness</u> and <u>political will</u> increased?	- Bellwether interviews - Media tracking - Speech tracking
2) Have state preschool <u>policies</u> on access or quality changed?	- Policy tracking
3) Have preschool <u>access</u> or <u>quality</u> improved?	- External data source tracking
4) What is the likelihood for <u>future policy progress</u> on preschool?	- Bellwether interviews

² This is a cumulative count of annual grants; it is not the number of organizations funded, as many grantees were funded in consecutive years.

³ Key constituencies for outreach are business, communities of color, early childhood education, K–12, and labor.

⁴ Fresno, Los Angeles, Merced, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara counties.

⁵ For more information on the evaluation methodology, see the “About the Evaluation Section” on page 13 of this brief.

Findings

Findings below are organized by evaluation question. Each section begins with a summary of the Packard Foundation's investments in that area, points of progress, and areas for improvement. Sections then discuss significant Packard Foundation's contributions to progress and lessons for future grantmaking.

1. Have preschool awareness and political will increased?

Packard Areas of Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Policymaker education and outreach- Outreach to key policy maker "influencers"- Coalition building and mobilization
Points of Progress	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Awareness about preschool's importance is high.</i> Almost all bellwethers (93%) interviewed in 2005 and 2008 were familiar with preschool and could talk substantively and fairly in-depth about the issue.- <i>Preschool is a recognized solution for addressing the achievement gap.</i> 84% of 2008 bellwethers agreed that high-quality preschool can help address the achievement gap. Also, both the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence and Superintendent of Public Instruction's P-16 Council⁶ recommended preschool as a way to bridge the gap.- <i>Legislative support for preschool has increased.</i> The number of legislators considered to be preschool champions nearly doubled in the last year. Many of these champions are influential, such as Senate President pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg.- <i>Other important champions also are in place.</i> This includes the Superintendent of Public Instruction and local champions that include mayors and county superintendents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Bipartisan support for preschool needs to increase.</i> Legislative support for quality preschool expansion is concentrated largely among Democrats (although many Republicans voted for at least one preschool bill in 2008).- <i>Business champions are lacking.</i> Few high-profile business champions have emerged in recent years.- <i>Gubernatorial support is inconsistent.</i> Gubernatorial support is important for policy advancement, but Governor Schwarzenegger has a mixed record on preschool.

Packard Foundation Contributions

Substantial progress has been made over the past 5 years on increasing preschool awareness and political will. Before Packard Foundation grantmaking began in 2003, preschool was just beginning to generate attention and was not seen as a distinct policy issue (separate from child

⁶ The Governor's Committee was a nonpartisan, privately funded group charged with examining K-12 education in California and recommending steps to improve public school performance (they were informed by *Getting Down to Facts*, a research project made up of over 20 research studies involving researchers from over 30 institutions). The P-16 Council is a statewide assembly of education, business, and community leaders convened by the Superintendent to develop a plan for closing the achievement gap.

care). Five years later, key audiences throughout the state are much more aware of preschool's importance and potential.

In addition, during the last 5 years, legislative support for preschool has increased considerably. While only a handful of policy makers championed preschool issues prior to 2003, now more than 20 are playing this role.

The preschool advocacy community is more organized and coherent as a result of Packard Foundation funding. Successfully generating political support for a policy issue requires a coordinated and unified advocacy effort. When the Packard Foundation began its grantmaking in 2003, the preschool advocacy community was disorganized. Some leadership existed, but organizations and individuals were isolated and not unified around a common policy agenda. Five years later the advocacy landscape looks much different. The Packard Foundation-created Preschool California now serves as a respected advocacy hub, a common policy framework exists, organizations regularly coordinate, and advocates statewide understand what to do and when. As the predominant preschool advocacy funder in the state, the Packard Foundation and its grantees unequivocally can take credit for this transformation.

The Foundation's long-term preschool commitment bolstered post-Proposition 82 activity and momentum. Proposition 82's defeat in 2006 was a disappointment for universal preschool advocates, and, in its aftermath, preschool proponents had to regroup. Ultimately, efforts to define the problem, generate proposals, and be a recognized voice in the policy process continued, as they did prior to the proposition, but with some adjustments in strategy and tactics. In the absence of a comprehensive statewide proposition, a more incremental policy change approach through the legislative process became the best option. The Packard Foundation's long-term preschool goal and commitment became particularly significant during this shift. Without the Foundation's ongoing investments, the momentum created in the lead up to the 2006 election would have fallen off significantly after the proposition's defeat and likely still would not have recovered.

Packard-funded research has been critical to building awareness and support. Research investments have been both important and strategic. Knowing that a compelling case for universal preschool would require state-specific data, the Foundation funded a series of research studies on *California*. These studies, particularly the six conducted by the RAND Corporation, were the first of their kind in the state. For example, in 2005 RAND estimated universal preschool's potential economic benefits for California and in 2008 RAND released its findings on the quality of early care and education for preschool-aged children in the state. While the value of this research on its own was high, the Foundation also made sure research findings were *heard*. Communications strategies were developed to disseminate RAND's research and preschool grantees were recruited to help relay the findings and their implications.

Packard grantees have connected preschool to K-12 issues and the achievement gap. The political importance of connecting preschool with K-12 issues, especially education reform and the achievement gap, has been clear since the Preschool Program's inception and grantmaking has supported this link. For example, grants have supported key K-12 groups such as local County Offices of Education and the California Federation of Teachers. Also, research grants have documented the state's school readiness gap, an antecedent to the achievement gap. Evaluation findings are clear that these messages have broken through. Eighty-four percent of bellwethers made the connection between preschool and the achievement gap during 2008 interviews, and two major education reform commissions convened by the Governor and

Superintendent of Public Instruction recently recommended preschool as a way to help bridge the achievement gap.

Packard funding has contributed to growth in state and local preschool champions. All policy issues need champions to shepherd them through the policy process and defend them in tough financial times. Champion development with many politically-important constituencies has been a grantee focus since the Preschool Program's start. Packard Foundation investments have played a significant role in champion development around the state, particularly within the legislature and in Packard target communities.

Lessons

Legislator outreach should have started earlier. The CFC team did not expect that a universal preschool ballot measure would emerge as quickly as it did after the Preschool Program began. In hindsight, the consensus is that it came too soon. But, when it became clear that Rob Reiner and the California Teacher's Association planned to move ahead on the proposition, the Foundation took advantage of the political environment this opportunity created and worked within it. Later, after the proposition was defeated, grantmaking again adjusted and adopted a focus on achieving policy progress through the legislature. While this adjustment showed the Foundation's ability to be flexible and adapt, grantmaking should have prepared for this contingency sooner rather than focus exclusively on the policy scenario the proposition created during the Preschool Program's early years.

Business champion engagement requires a different approach. Business leaders who understand preschool's long-term economic benefits can be some of the most effective preschool advocates, particularly because they hold significant sway in the policy arena. Consequently, preschool grantmaking has included business community outreach to develop such champions.

So far, however, results have been disappointing. While early on Boeing chairman and former Hewlett Packard CEO Lew Platt became preschool's strongest business champion, his passing in 2005 left a space that to date has been hard to fill (although some champions like former Agilent Technologies chairman, president, and CEO Ned Barnholt have since emerged). In part, this is because fewer business leaders are becoming civic leaders, and, instead, business groups or associations increasingly are assuming this role. Picking up on this trend, the Packard Foundation's recent grants to several business associations has helped the business community start to put its toe back into the water on preschool. This is an area, however, that the Foundation should monitor carefully and prepare to adjust if necessary.

Divisions in the early care and education community need to be addressed. The early care and education community as a whole focuses on children ages birth to 5. However, some organizations and individuals focus more on infants and toddlers (ages birth to 3), and others focus more on preschool-age children. When preschool is prioritized, birth-to-3 proponents often are concerned that infants and toddlers are being left behind. Consequently, they do not throw their support behind efforts to promote preschool expansion, thereby splintering the early care and education community and sending mixed signals to policy makers about the importance of investing in 3- and 4-year-olds.

This splintering occurred in California, particularly in the Preschool Program's early years. Although the Packard Foundation's prioritization of preschool certainly was not the only factor in this rift, and the Foundation funded select birth-to-3 organizations as part of its preschool

grantmaking, the Foundation received some blame within the early care and education community for the division.

While some criticism is unavoidable with any grantmaking strategy, this division continued until recently when the CFC team recognized the need to address this division more explicitly. Several Packard grantees now are engaging the birth-to-three and preschool communities under a larger birth-to-5 agenda while still prioritizing preschool. As one preschool insider put it, the Foundation is “softening the edges” around preschool and consequently is helping to build a more united advocacy front. This approach should continue in future years to strengthen and further unify preschool advocacy efforts.

2. Have preschool policies on access or quality changed?

<p>Packard Areas of Investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy proposal development - Nonpartisan policy analysis and research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coalition building and mobilization - Nonlobbying advocacy outreach
<p>Points of Progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>State education spending on 3- and 4-year-olds has increased every year since 2003. Funding has grown by \$217 million.</i> - <i>In 2006, the state appropriated \$100 million in new dollars for preschool. \$50 million went for increased enrollment and \$50 million for facilities.</i> - <i>In 2008, the legislature passed 3 important preschool bills. All were low-cost changes that will improve the preschool system’s quality and efficiency.</i> - <i>The State First 5 Commission committed \$100 million to local preschool expansion. Soon after Packard’s preschool grantmaking began, the State First 5 Commission launched the <i>Power of Preschool</i> demonstration program (although this commitment has not been fully realized).</i> - <i>Several target communities have made large preschool commitments totaling over \$850 million, primarily with First 5 dollars. At least 5 Packard target communities have made significant 5- and 10-year commitments to quality preschool expansion.</i> 	<p>Areas for Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>A sustainable state-level funding source will be required to make major progress on preschool access and quality. Local funding commitments are time-limited and will have difficulty sustaining without a statewide funding solution.</i>

Packard Foundation Contributions

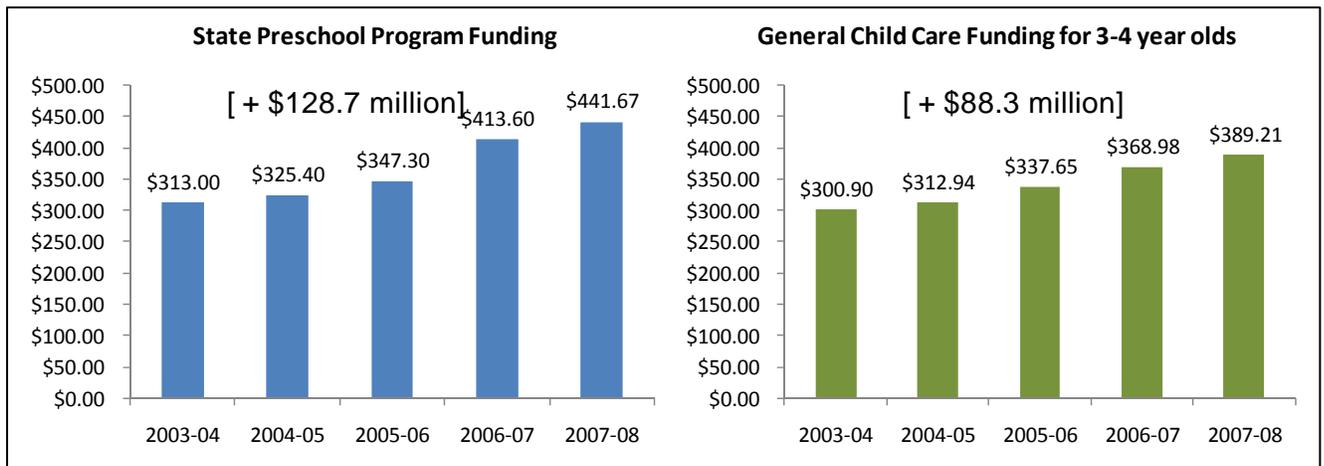
Although emphasis on achieving policy progress through the legislature began just 2 years ago, this strategy adjustment is starting to show results. The number of preschool bills introduced in the legislature has increased fivefold since 2003. Also, largely because of grantees’ efforts to focus more on quality and efficiency in addition to access, these bills have become more diverse, emphasizing broader changes that are needed to improve the state’s existing preschool system.

While policies enacting major quality preschool expansions have not occurred, the legislature has passed several important preschool bills in the last 2 years.

Packard grantees have played a significant role in informing legislative policy proposals introduced since 2006. Packard grantees are the most recognized voices educating policy makers about preschool in Sacramento. Spearheading these efforts are the key leadership and engagement grantees—Preschool California, Children Now, and The Advancement Project. While all grantees play nonlobbying roles using Packard Foundation funding, several bills introduced during the last session came from ideas that originated with these organizations.

Bellwether interview data support the point that Packard grantees are visible policy players. Bellwethers were asked in both 2005 and 2008 whom they saw as the key preschool supporters in the state (they were not prompted with names). In 2008, First 5 topped the list, but all other organizations mentioned were Packard Foundation grantees.

Preschool grantees have maintained the State’s focus even in tough budget times. As the graphs below illustrate, the state Department of Education’s annual spending on early education for 3- and 4-year-olds has increased every year since 2003.⁷ While most of these have been reimbursement rate increases due to cost-of-living adjustments, the larger point is that even in tough budget times over the past 5 years (and last 2 years especially), state preschool funding did not decrease and even increased several times in response to preschool advocacy efforts.⁸ Without Packard-funded advocates continuously championing the preschool cause, this funding could have been an easy target for spending cuts.



⁷ The State Preschool Program serves children ages 3–5 who have experienced or are at risk for abuse, neglect, or exploitation or are from families with an income below 75% of the state media income. Most State Preschool Programs are half-day, educational programs and are run by a mix of public and private providers under contract to the state. Some state preschool programs are full-day or are combined with Head Start to offer full-day educational programs to low-income children. General Child Care Programs offer full-day education and child care services for 3- and 4-year-olds with working parents, and follow the same curricula and requirements as the State Preschool Program.

⁸ Ten million dollars in previous-year cuts were restored in 2004–2005; \$50 million for AB 172 was added in 2006–2007; \$5 million for wraparound care was added in 2007–2008.

Lessons

Target community investments could link more effectively with state-level leadership and engagement efforts to push for policy progress. The Foundation’s three grantmaking strands— leadership and engagement, research, and target community support—should be strong independently but also reinforce one another. Such connections have occurred, but they could be stronger moving forward.

Specifically, the connection between target community efforts and state-level advocacy should be strengthened. This may involve, for example, investing more in efforts to build on-the-ground demand for preschool. The likelihood that political leaders will recognize the promise of scaling up target communities’ high-quality preschool demonstrations will increase if both “top down” and “bottom up” advocacy efforts are coordinated.

3. Have preschool access or quality improved?

Packard Areas of Investment <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Support and technical assistance for county- and school district-based preschool programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Facilities financing- Preschool program quality enhancements- Improvements in teacher education and training
Points of Progress <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Gradual growth in the state’s preschool budget has increased the number of children served.</i> Since 2003, an additional 18,885 four-year-olds and 4,462 three-year-olds have been served.- <i>A focus on preschool facilities also has improved access.</i> The state’s child care revolving fund increased by \$50 million and LA passed an education bond with \$80 million for preschool facilities.- <i>Select target communities have high-quality programs.</i> Packard target communities are implementing some of the highest quality programs in the state.- <i>Two major statewide quality improvement efforts are underway.</i> New preschool standards and a Quality Improvement System will improve quality statewide.- <i>New legislation (AB 2759) will produce up to \$100 million in administrative cost savings that can be used to improve preschool access and quality.</i> Savings will come from consolidating and streamlining programs for preschool-aged children.	Areas for Improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Preschool access statewide has not increased substantially and will not without a major state-level policy change.</i> While preschool demonstration programs in Packard Foundation target communities are serving over 50,000 children, California carries a significant unmet preschool need and local programs have major sustainability challenges.- <i>California as a state falls short on preschool quality.</i> 2008 RAND research found that preschool quality across the state is lacking and there is substantial room for improving preschool quality for all children.

Packard Foundation Contributions

Questions about access and quality improvements should be viewed through two lenses: a) at the state level, examining whether preschool access and quality have changed for the state as a whole, and b) at the level of Packard target communities. Although some progress has occurred at the state level on access and quality, major advancements have not yet been realized. Select Packard target communities, however, have made notable preschool commitments and expansions.

At the local level, several Packard Foundation target communities have high-quality programs. While statewide California has much room for improvement on quality, local preschool sites in Packard target communities are implementing some of the highest quality programs in the state. The Foundation’s support for technical assistance and quality enhancements in these communities have added important value, and these pockets of quality and innovation are providing examples that the state as a whole can learn from and build on.

Grantees’ focus on preschool facilities is helping to move the access issue. Increasing preschool access has little benefit unless the space and facilities exist to house programs. The facilities issue has received some much-needed attention in the past five years (i.e., a \$50 million increase in the state’s child care facilities revolving loan fund and a Los Angeles education bond that included \$80 million for preschool facilities), and Packard grantees have been exploring the possibility of including up to \$1 billion in preschool facilities funding in the next statewide K–12 bond.

The Packard Foundation also has paid special attention to facilities through grants for child care and preschool facilities development to the Foundation-created ABCD fund housed at the Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF). LIIF currently is funding almost 15 times as many facilities projects as it did in 2003 to create, upgrade, or improve preschool spaces. While closing the preschool facilities gap in California will require a state-level policy and funding solution, these efforts are supporting development now while also providing a model for how to administer facilities funding and supports when a broader scale solution is found.

Quality Standards that California State-Funded Preschool Meets

Preschool Quality Benchmarks	# States Meeting	California Meet?
1. Early learning standards	8	YES
2. Teacher BA degree	27	
3. Teacher specialized training	36	YES
4. Assistant teacher CDA degree	11	
5. Teacher in-service	37	YES
6. Maximum class size	41	
7. Staff-child ratio 1:10	42	YES
8. Health screening and referral and support	35	
9. At least one meal	24	
10. Site visits and monitoring	38	YES

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research

Lessons

Target community expansions will not sustain without a state-level funding solution. While local communities have shown initiative on quality preschool expansion, the lack of a statewide funding solution threatens their long-term viability. For example, First 5 commitments for preschool expansion may be scaled back. In fact, this currently is happening in San Mateo County, the first county in California to develop and implement a universal preschool effort for all 3- and 4-year-olds. Unless a sustainable state funding source is achieved, it will be difficult for most communities that ventured ahead on quality preschool expansion to sustain their commitments.

California has a long way to go on quality. All states require preschools to meet some quality standards to receive public funds. The National Institute for Early Education Research tracks state requirements using a checklist of ten quality benchmarks and then compares states on their

performance. State-funded preschool in California currently meets five out of the 10 standards; in 2003 it met only 3 out of 10.⁹ While this is promising progress, California has significant room for improvement. Seventeen states currently meet 8 or more quality standards and only 10 states (including California) meet 5 or fewer.¹⁰

The next 5 years represent an important opportunity for more Foundation investments to improve preschool quality. Teacher education and training show particular promise for progress.

4. What is the likelihood for future policy progress on preschool?

<p>Packard Areas of Investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All investments together aim to improve chances for preschool advancements in the policy arena 	
<p>Points of Progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>In principle, support exists for future preschool expansion.</i> The overwhelming majority (80%) of bellwethers said they think preschool should be expanded in California. 	<p>Areas for Improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The budget climate has reduced chances for near-term preschool investments.</i> Almost three-fourths of 2008 bellwethers (70%) thought preschool increases were not likely in the next 3 years. - <i>Support for a universal preschool policy, at least for now, has decreased.</i> Only half of 2008 bellwethers said they wanted a universal policy. Most who did not, preferred targeted expansion.

Packard Foundation Contributions

California currently faces one of its worst economic climates in history, with a budget deficit estimated at over \$17 billion. Given this climate, preschool expansions or improvements with large price tags are not likely in the near term.

Low-cost policy options to improve the existing preschool system are keeping preschool on the policy agenda and paving the way for future expansions. With state deficit estimates increasing continuously, proposals for any significant increases in preschool spending this past legislative session were not feasible. Packard Foundation grantees took the opportunity instead to propose several no- or low-cost policy ideas that would make important differences in the preschool system.

Key 2008 Preschool Policies

SB 1629 establishes a state Early Learning Quality Improvement System commission. The State First 5 Commission will fund its work.

AB 2759 consolidates and streamlines Title 5 child development programs that serve preschool-aged children. Combining the funds will result in administrative cost savings of up to \$100 million, which could be used to expand preschool access and improve quality. It also will create the largest state preschool program in the nation.

SB 1298 establishes a data commission to develop a statewide education information system that includes preschool.

⁹ The two quality standards met since 2003 are new early learning standards and teacher in-service requirements.

¹⁰ Barnett, W.S., Hustedt, J. T., Friedman, A. H., Boyd, J. S., & Ainsworth, P. (2008). *The state of preschool 2007*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Early Education Research.

These efforts paid off. Legislators in both the Assembly and the Senate proposed and passed three bills that Packard Foundation grantees were critical in informing (see box on this page). Focusing on these less costly improvements to improve the existing system has been strategic and has maintained preschool advocacy and policy momentum even in difficult economic times.

Lessons

Chances for preschool investments during the next several years are low. The economic context and budget climate is too competitive and challenging to expect any major new expenditures in the short term. Evaluation results from 2008 bellwether interviews support this point, revealing that almost three-fourths of bellwethers (70%) thought preschool increases were not very or not at all likely. Even the 29% who thought increases were at least somewhat likely said they probably would not happen until 2011.

Universal preschool is a particularly hard sell. While support still exists for universal preschool as a long-term goal, in the current budget climate the preference is for more targeted expansion for children from low-income families and for children entering low-performing elementary schools.

Conclusions

Targeted expansion is a more realistic goal by 2013. Evaluation findings support adjustments in the Preschool Program's ultimate goal. The political probability of achieving a universal preschool policy in the next five years is low in the current and near-future budget context. More support exists for preschool expansion that targets the children who need it most. This does not mean the long-range goal of universal preschool is no longer viable. Rather, it means this goal will likely take longer than 2013 to achieve.

Several subgoals also are attainable. Given recent policy progress and momentum in California, additional goals around improving the preschool system are probable by 2013. These include policy changes that improve preschool quality and efficiency and that prepare the system for a larger expansion down the road. The Foundation should develop concrete subgoals that include such system improvements and signal important progress toward achieving a longer term universal preschool goal.

Overall, the Preschool Program's general theory of change and strategy still remain valid. During the past 5 years, the Foundation's strategy has provided organization and direction to California's preschool efforts while also leaving enough room for flexibility and adjustments. While adjustments have been recommended tactically and to the strategy's overall goal, the strategy's basic premises about what it takes to achieve significant change on preschool access and quality in California remain valid. Continued commitment to this overall strategy has substantial potential for further results that will benefit California's children through 2013 and beyond.

About the Evaluation

This evaluation represented a new and pioneering approach within the Packard Foundation.

Early on, the CFC team recognized that the process for achieving universally-available quality preschool would unfold without a predictable script. As such, they determined the evaluation would be most useful if it informed the Preschool Program as it evolved, providing data and feedback in real time.

With that in mind, the evaluation was developed with three main goals:

1. Provide feedback on strategy outcomes, including short-term and intermediate outcomes
2. Provide ongoing feedback to inform strategy modifications or midcourse corrections
3. Minimize grantee burden and collect information that is useful to grantees.

Regular reporting and feedback facilitates learning and informs the preschool strategy. To meet the above goals, HFRP collects, analyzes, and reports data in a timely manner and in a way that is useful for decision making. This approach is in contrast to the more traditional practice of collecting data retrospectively after a grantmaking strategy has been implemented. Instead, HFRP continuously gathers data as the Preschool Program is being implemented and issues short “learning reports” as data come in. Evaluators then facilitate “learning meetings” with the CFC team to discuss evaluation data and their implications.

This approach has clear benefits for the Foundation and for grantees. For example, bellwether interview data signal areas where advocacy efforts can be strengthened (while also validating areas where they are working well). Media tracking reveals if messaging and communications strategies are breaking through and where more emphasis is needed.

This type of evaluation requires partnership and regular dialogue between the Foundation and evaluators. Implementing this new real-time approach to evaluation, combined with the challenges of evaluating complex and dynamic public policy efforts, has required innovation and collaboration. The Foundation and preschool grantees have been willing and valuable partners in this endeavor. As a result, much has been learned about the evaluation along the way, and this reflection has strengthened HFRP’s evaluation, increased its usefulness, and provided lessons for other Packard Foundation evaluations that are taking a similar approach.

About Harvard Family Research Project

Harvard Family Research Project researches, develops, and evaluates strategies to promote the well being of children, youth, families, and their communities. We work primarily within three areas that support children’s learning and development—early childhood education, out-of-school time programming, and family and community support in education. Underpinning all of our work is a commitment to evaluation for strategic decision making, learning, and accountability. Building on our knowledge that schools cannot do it alone, we also focus national attention on complementary learning. Complementary learning is the idea that a systemic approach, which integrates school and nonschool supports, can better ensure that all children have the skills they need to succeed. To learn more about how HFRP can support your work with children and families, visit our website at www.hfrp.org.